

**SERMON TITLE:** “The Lord is My Portion”  
**TEXT:** Lamentations 3:21-26  
**PREACHED AT:** Neighbourhood Church (Nanaimo)  
**BY:** Ryan Dueck  
**DATE:** July 1, 2012/5<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

---

Well, it is a combination of very strange and very good to be here this morning!  
Far more good than strange!

It is hard to believe that it has been a full year since we said goodbye and headed back over the Rockies to southern AB. And yet, it has been a year where a lot has happened—for us and for you as a church family, no doubt.

For those of you who are more recent additions to the Neighbourhood Church family, I must offer an apology or qualification here at the outset. I apologize if this sermon is overly familiar or if it makes reference to events, experiences, etc that you aren't familiar with. I couldn't think of any way to approach the sermon this morning other than as a kind of informal family reunion ☺.

I know many of you are wondering what we have been up to over the past year, how we are doing, etc. Hopefully a bit of that will come out in the themes and the Scriptures I have chosen to reflect upon this morning.

This week when I sat down to write this sermon, I found myself unsure where to begin. So I revisited the words that I spoke in this same spot almost exactly a year ago.

One sentence in particular stood out to me:

I am convinced that as a community of faith, goodbyes ought to be deeper and more joyful and hopeful among us, even if there is still sadness, because of what we believe about God's story and our stories and how the two fit together.

I think this also applies to “hellos” and “good to see you again's.” I think our reunions can be deeper and more joyful as Christians because what we believe about God's story and our stories and how the two fit together.

For me—for us—this date has been a highlight on the calendar for a long time. We have really been looking forward to being with you again today.

As I said a year ago, Neighbourhood Church is a part of our story as a family, and we are really happy to be back today.

---

The Scripture I have chosen for this morning comes from what might be seen as a bit of an unusual book of the Bible. We are in the book of Lamentations, which

is an extended reflection upon the Israelites' experience of watching their temple and their city being destroyed by the Babylonians around six centuries before the time of Christ.

Unsurprisingly, it is not the happiest of books. But it does contain a famous passage that we have already read/will read in a minute from which one of our most well-known hymns comes from ("Great is Thy Faithfulness").

I am going to focus on three themes contained in Lamentations 3:21-26 through three lenses:

1. The lens of our move back to AB
2. The lens of an MCC learning tour to Colombia that I was a part of in April
3. The lens of Neighbourhood Church and your life here in Nanaimo

That's a lot of "threes," but my hope is that my reflecting on the faithfulness of God through these three lenses, we can all be invited to reflect upon, perhaps rediscover, and celebrate the faithfulness of God in our lives, wherever we are and wherever we have been over the last year.

First, let's read from Lamentations 3 (NRSV):

**21** But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: **22** The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; **23** they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. **24** "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." **25** The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. **26** It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

So, three themes (these are not in the order they appear in the text).

---

### The Lord is My Portion (Lam. 3:24)

Verse 24 says, "The Lord is my portion... therefore I will hope in him"

The language is a bit unfamiliar to us. What is a "portion?" And what does it mean to use this word in connection with hope in the Lord?

In the context in which this passage was written, the word "portion" referred to a tribal inheritance of land (cf. Psalm 16:5). Land represented security and stability. It meant no longer moving from place to place as a nomad. Land meant "settledness"—a place to call your own, a place where you belonged, a place that belonged to you.

Land meant a hopeful future.

**Colombia:** During our tour in Colombia a few months ago, one of the things we soon discovered was that land was at the heart of a huge number of problems in this country, as is the case around the world.

Colombia has nearly 5 million internally displaced people—the highest of any nation on earth. The vast majority of these are small farmers who have been forced off their land by large foreign companies (many of which are Canadian, incidentally!) who want their land for mineral extraction (gold, platinum, etc), or palm oil production, or big agribusiness.

Or by their own government who is seeking to drive economic investment in the country.

Or by various illegal armed groups who are in the pay of either the Colombian government or the big foreign companies.

The bottom line is, there are millions of people who have been forced from their land. Millions of people who wander into the big cities and set up vast sprawling shack towns.

Millions of people who are abandoned and forgotten by their own government. Millions of people with no “portion” to call their own.

This is the reality that MCC is working to address in Colombia.

To be landless is to be disoriented and destabilized. It is to *not* have a stable place to put your feet. It is to *not* have a clear idea of who you are and what you are to do.

**Alberta:** On a *much* less drastic scale, our family has experienced destabilization and dislocation over the past year. Even though we moved “home,” we have had to (and continue to) work through the disorientation that comes from moving from somewhere secure and stable (Nanaimo) to a place that, while familiar, is different than we remember.

We knew this would be the case, of course. We knew that leaving a loving, supportive church community, leaving a city that we were growing to know and love, enrolling our kids in a different school, etc would be difficult.

We knew that even though we were going to a familiar destination, we would have to “start over” in many ways

- new church with new ways of doing things
- new denominational structures
- new schools
- new dynamics with old friends
- getting used to the southern AB wind again! (and missing the ocean!)

There have been many joys and affirmations throughout this past year, but our experience has also forced the questions, again and again,

- Where do I put my hope?
  - o My career? My competence? My connections?
- To what is my identity tied?
  - o My family? My kids? My denomination?
- What (or who) is my “portion?”
  - o Is it the specifics of my current situation? Or is it the God who has led and continues to lead and guide my path and our path as a family?

*Does the deepest and most secure part of my identity consist in what I can achieve or secure for myself, or is it found in the God who created and loves me, no matter what I do and no matter where I go?*

**Nanaimo:** These same questions are posed to you, here in Nanaimo.

You may have lived here for fifty years or five weeks. You may be stable and settled or restless and hungry for change. You may be dealing with any number of issues at work or in your family. You may have massive decisions looming on the horizon or are settling into a comfortable and predictable routine.

What is your “portion?”

To what or to whom do you turn for stability and security? Where is your deepest source of peace and hope found? In your location or occupation? In your family and friends? In your strengths and abilities?

Or, like the writer of Lamentations, can we say, “**The Lord** is my portion. I will hope in him?”

---

It is Good That One Should Wait for the Salvation of the Lord... (Lam 3:26)

**Colombia:** In Colombia, we saw some truly desperate situations. We saw extreme poverty, crippling injustice, and overwhelming despair and tragedy.

We saw the effects that the decisions of the few and the powerful had upon the many and the powerless. We saw a staggering gap between the rich and the poor that seemed almost impossible to cross.

We heard stories from victims of oppression and suffering that were heartbreaking and left us feeling angry and frustrated on their behalf.

How could we, with any integrity, tell people who are so well-acquainted with suffering, to “wait quietly” for the salvation of the Lord? Action was what was needed, not waiting for a God who seemed uninterested in helping!

Yet, very often we did not observe these sentiments in the Colombians we interacted with.

We observed action, certainly. The Colombians were not sitting idly by waiting for God to swoop in from the sky to rescue them. But it was not anxious, restless, naïve action.

More often than not, we observed a quiet strength grounded in a deep, experiential conviction that God was with them, that God stood with the poor and oppressed, that every effort they made to work for change was an attempt to work alongside God.

**Alberta:** It is not easy to wait quietly, is it? For anything.

We live in a culture where everything we want is (or *ought* to be, we think) available instantly. We expect information at the click of a mouse or a few buttons on our phones.

News headlines now come to us in real time via instant “tweets,” rather than something archaic like a morning paper.

We complain when we have to wait at the checkout counter, in traffic, in the ferry lineup, when our computers or phones don’t respond *instantly!!*

The digital age is not one that cultivates or rewards patient waiting.

During our first year back in Alberta, I have often found myself feeling restless. I have wanted to move through all of the unpleasant parts of relocating, learning a new position, settling back into old relationships, etc and just arrive at the part where I feel wonderfully settled, and where everything always works the way it is supposed to with minimal (if any) inconvenience to me.



I’m not very good at waiting. But as I look back on the past year, I can see that perhaps God was asking me to simply wait quietly. To not get ahead of myself or of God. To ask what I might learn in and from the *painful* parts of the journey, not just the joyful and affirming ones.

Where did I ever get the idea, after all, that the life of discipleship was one of instant gratification and comfort?

**Nanaimo:** What about you? How might God be at work in your story? Are there areas in your life, whether as individuals or as a church community, where God might be saying, “Just wait. There are things that I want you to learn, ways that I want you to grow, challenges that I need to prepare you for. Don’t get ahead of the story that I am writing with your life. Just wait.”

“It is good to wait for the salvation of the Lord.”

We may be able to do some things on our own, we may be able to get a little bit ahead, but we are **absolutely powerless** when it comes to fulfilling our deepest longings for security, for peace, for a hope that transcends our short years on this planet.

It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord because the salvation of the Lord is the only salvation that matters, in the end, anyway.

We cannot save ourselves from anything or for anything that matters in the grand scheme of things.

So we might as well wait.

---

#### Great is Your Faithfulness... (Lam. 3:23)

**Colombia:** We had only been in Colombia a few days when we were taken to a place that, for many of us, was unlike anything we had ever seen before.

It was a sprawling hillside full of patched together shacks, garbage, and mud. I had never seen poverty like this. Tens of thousands of women, men, and children living in conditions that would have been inadequate for some of the farmers in AB to house their livestock.

We heard stories of countless stories of violence and corruption and injustice. We saw and heard and smelled a situation that seemed utterly hopeless.

Yet, as we toured around this community, and as we met Colombians from Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren churches and MCC workers who lived and worked there, who provided meals and education and after-school programs for kids, and art classes, and sports activities, and ... we heard a variation of the consistent refrain, “God is faithful.”

They knew that most of us came from a position of unimaginable privilege compared to them. But they didn’t ask for anything other than prayer and relationship with their northern sisters and brothers.

“God is faithful,” they said. We look to God.

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end.”

It was hard for me to see how this was the case in Colombia. But not so much for them.

I think they knew, on a deep, experiential level, what it the writer of Psalm 145 said:

The eyes of all look to you,  
and you give them their food at the proper time.

<sup>16</sup> You open your hand  
and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

They knew, in a way that I did not, what it meant to depend—to really *depend*—upon the faithfulness of God to satisfy.

They were grateful for the mercies of God, new each morning, in a way that I was not.

They knew that the steadfast love of the Lord was the final word about them, about their country, whatever calamities befell.

**Alberta:** Our family has moved three times in the past seven years. Each time, it has been a disorienting experience, as I have already alluded to. It has not always been easy to figure out or understand what the will of God for us looked like.

But as I look back at the past seven years ago in the life of our family, as I look back at our first year back in Alberta, I can, with the writer of Lamentations, rejoice in the faithfulness of God. I can say that steadfast love of God has never ceased, even if I have not always been good at seeing it or thanking God for it.

I can see that wherever our family has gone and whatever we have done, God has been with us, nudging, guiding, pushing, pulling, tending, mending, inspiring, and changing.

**Perhaps more importantly, I think I am coming to a deeper realization that, ultimately, God’s faithfulness is far more important, far more reliable, than mine.**

My faithfulness is hampered by many things—by sin and stubbornness, by self-interest, by impatience and forgetfulness, by doubt and cynicism, by apathy and neglect.

“Thy” faithfulness is much greater than “my” faithfulness.

God's faithfulness is strong and true. Always.

**Nanaimo:** The invitation to you, here at Neighbourhood Church in Nanaimo, BC, is to look at your own lives for traces of God's faithfulness.

They are there, I assure you. I know enough of the story of this people and this place to know that there are countless examples of God's steadfast love, his endless mercies, his faithfulness that is beyond measure.

But we have to do the work of remembering.

Lamentations 3:21 begins, "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope..."

*I call to mind.*

To call something to mind implies intentionality. It implies a deliberate *choice* to turn our hearts and minds to instances where we have seen evidence of God's faithfulness.

We do not automatically notice God's faithfulness, I have discovered. At least not all of us. We take it for granted or ignore it. We presume upon it or complain that it isn't more obvious or consistent.

But if we are to be a people characterized by the deep peace, hope, and joy of the way of Jesus, we need to become more skilled and more persistent in calling God's faithfulness to mind.

There are many ways of doing this. It could be as simple as praying to ask God to show you, to remind you, to open the eyes of your heart (as we sang earlier) to see the many and varied ways that God has been guiding and shaping your paths

It could mean writing things down—many people find journaling to be a good way to keep track of "God-sightings" in their lives.

It could mean borrowing the eyes and ears of a trusted friend—often, others see God's faithfulness in our lives better than we do!

Whatever approach we take, I am convinced that an important part of living faithfully in God's story means slowly learning to become better interpreters of God's work in our lives, whether we are in a South American slum, a small town on the Canadian prairies, or right here on Vancouver Island.

Because, after all, God's faithfulness is not something that just parachutes down into our lives every now and then and orchestrates things according to our desires. Our happiness or comfort or inner peace or... whatever, is not the

ultimate barometer of whether or not God is faithful because God's ultimate goal is not to make us happy but to conform us into the image of his son, and to fit us for glory.

**God's faithfulness permeates every part of our lives, the good and the bad. And it never leaves us.**

We cannot go where God is not.

This is good news! This is the best news there is!

My hope and my prayer for you, here at Neighbourhood Church, is that you would continue to grow into a community that knows deeply and speaks often of God's faithfulness.

My prayer is that we would all have eyes and ears to see and hear God's mercies, which are new each morning—that we would continually call these things to mind, and that they would fill us with the hope of the risen Christ.

Amen.